DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 465 355 HE 035 005

AUTHOR Long, Bridget Terry
TITLE Attracting the Best: The Use of Honors Programs To Compete for Students.
SPONS AGENCY Spencer Foundation, Chicago, IL.
PUB DATE 2002-03-29
NOTE 27p.
PUB TYPE Numerical/Quantitative Data (110) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *High Achievement; Higher Education; *Honors Curriculum; Program Effectiveness; *Student Recruitment

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development and role of honors programs and colleges at U.S. institutions of higher education. The creation of honors programs may be in response to increased competition between colleges for high-achieving students and heightened concerns in some states about brain drain. Little is known about the rate of growth of honors programs, their function within higher education, and the effects they have on host institutions and students. Using an empirical data set compiled from several sources, this study examined the types of colleges that have created honors programs and the characteristics and structures of these programs. It also considers how the development of honors programs has changed over time and how it relates to larger trends in higher education. The presence of honors programs appears widespread in the U.S. educational system, although they are a relatively new phenomenon. Nearly half of all public four-year colleges and universities have an honors program, and many are found at private institutions. Honors programs are most likely to be found at institutions ranked as very competitive or competitive, larger institutions, those with the Carnegie classification of research, or doctoral. Institutional patterns suggest that honors programs are indeed used as a competitive tool to attract high-achieving students. (Contains 10 tables and 17 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 465 355

Attracting the Best:
The Use of Honors Programs to Compete for Students

Bridget Terry Long*
Harvard Graduate School of Education

March 29, 2002

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B Long
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development and role of honors programs and colleges at American institutions of higher education. These programs offer additional resources to select students in the form of special seminars and classes, enhanced student services, and better facilities. The creation of honors programs may be in response to increased competition between colleges for high-achieving students and heightened concerns in some states about "brain drain." However, little is known about the rate of growth of honors programs, their function within higher education, or the effects they have on their host institutions and students. This paper serves as the first step towards filling this gap in the literature. Utilizing an empirical data set compiled from several sources, I examine what types of colleges have created honors programs and the characteristics and structure of these programs. Furthermore, I consider how the development of honors programs has changed over time and may be linked to larger trends in higher education. This work adds to the literature on the objectives and behavior of colleges and universities. Moreover, the study gives further perspective on the current shift in college financial aid from need-based to merit-based support.

---

* Bridget Long is an Assistant Professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Comments are welcome and should be directed to Bridget_Long@harvard.edu. This research was made possible by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. The views expressed are solely those of the author. Bomy Hong provided excellent research assistance.

#E035005

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

I. INTRODUCTION

Competition among colleges and universities for the best students has grown substantially in recent decades. Prospective students are now faced with a myriad of college options, and institutions routinely offer large scholarship packages in order to recruit the most-talented applicants. However, not all recruitment efforts have been in the form of direct financial aid. In recent years, many colleges and universities have increasingly marketed themselves to high-achieving students by creating honor programs and colleges.[1] These programs offer additional resources to select students in the form of access to prominent faculty members, special courses and seminars, enhanced student services, and better facilities.

The growing presence of honors programs is part of a larger shift in policy from traditional need-based aid to merit-based support. According to McPherson and Schapiro (1998), during the 1980s, non-need based aid (not including athletic scholarships) grew 13 percent at private colleges while need-based aid grew only 10 percent. This trend was even more pronounced at public four-year institutions where non-need-based aid grew at an annual rate of 12 percent while need-based aid grew only 6 percent. These trends are suspected to have continued during the last ten years particularly at public institutions and from state governments. Increasingly, state legislatures have voiced fears about "brain drain" (losing their best students to other states during and after the college years). Perhaps as a response, state-sponsored, merit-based aid programs like the Georgia HOPE Scholarship, which covers full public tuition for in-state students with a B average, have become popular in many states. According to a 1999 report from the Education Commission of the States, sixteen states had some sort of performance-based college tuition assistance program, ten of which have been started since 1997. In contrast, honors programs are a more-focused way to target the very top students.

Unlike other forms of merit-based aid, the establishment and maintenance of honors programs at colleges and universities are *institutional* activities likely to impact the operations and constituencies of a particular school. Although honors colleges have increasingly become known as inexpensive, high-quality college options for talented students, there is little information about which types of institutions establish these programs or the impact these programs have. This paper is a first

attempt to fill that gap in the literature by providing a detailed profile of honor programs at American colleges and universities.

The paper first examines what types of colleges have created honors programs. What are the characteristics of the host institutions, and are there any clear patterns that might explain why the honors programs were established? Second, I examine how honors programs are structured. What do honors programs offer to prospective students? Since the market of higher education has changed considerably during the last several decades with increased competition, I also consider how the development of honors programs has changed over time. Are more recent programs different in any way from the older programs? Using quantitative data from several sources, including the 1997 and 1999 editions of *Peterson's Honors Programs*, a guide to over 500 programs, this paper is an examination of the development of honors programs. This work adds to the literature on the objectives and behavior of colleges and universities. Moreover, the study gives further perspective on the current shift in college financial aid from need-based to merit-based support.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Growing Importance of High-Quality Students

In economics, a production function describes the process of how inputs are used to create an output. When this theory is applied to education, the important role of students, particularly high-achieving students, becomes evident. They enter both sides of the equation as an input as well as an output (Rothschild and White, 1993). As an input, high-ability students offer positive peer effects for their classmates and may also influence the school's appeal to faculty members. As an output, their successes in the labor market contribute to the outcomes one often uses to judge the effectiveness of an educational program. Therefore, it is clear that high-achieving students make important positive contributions in the production of higher education, and colleges have many incentives to attract them.

The importance of high-quality students in higher education has grown considerably in recent years as competition among schools has increased. Since 1950, American higher education has grown from a collection of small, local markets to one that is integrated nationally and regionally.

---

[1] Hence forth I will use the term "honors program" to refer to both honors program and colleges.

Hoxby (1997) discusses some of the causes for this change. First, the advent of standardized admissions testing and the information system generated by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation enabled students and colleges to communicate their skills and interests across different communities. Second, the decreasing real costs of transportation and communication made travel to distant schools easier. This happened in conjunction with increased student mobility associated with the GI Bill. Finally, the advent of standardized financial needs analysis helped students to secure funding while tuition reciprocity agreements among states allowed them to attend schools in other states for a discounted price.

One consequence of this market integration is the reduction of university power over the factors of production, most importantly students. Increased competition has meant that colleges have had to "pay" their valuable student inputs more in order to keep them. This has translated into larger scholarships for high achievers. Furthermore, the market gives colleges the incentive to compete by trying to raise quality rather than lower price. This is due to the student quality multiplier: if quality is raised keeping price constant, more high-achieving students will be attracted, thereby multiplying the effect of raising college quality (Hoxby, 1997). This has resulted in many colleges seeking almost any alternative to raise their quality.

The popularity and weight given to college ranking systems highlights the increasing role of competition in higher education. The criteria for the rankings are largely based on the characteristics of the student body. College guides like Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges* use information on student body test scores and class rank to categorize schools. Meanwhile *the U.S. News & World Report* ranking system uses many factors related to student achievement to compare colleges. For example, academic reputation makes up 25 percent of the score while student selectivity counts for 15 percent and the retention rate 20 percent (Graham and Morse, 2000). Several studies document how these rankings have impacted the behavior of many institutions seeking to increase their status (see Ehrenberg, 2000 for a discussion of Cornell University's actions).

Honors Programs

As a result of the trends discussed above, institutions have been left with the question of how they can attract the best students. Given constraints imposed by state legislatures, trustee boards, and

alumni, often colleges must consider how to accomplish this task without disturbing the current mission of the college. This has led many to turn to the option of establishing an honors program. Honors programs satisfy the need to attract high-quality students by offering them additional enticements and benefits. Moreover, it is a way to reallocate funds towards better students without drastically changing the school or having to start a new one. For states, honors program offer a way to combat brain drain while still fulfilling the public mission of providing a postsecondary option for all residents regardless of ability. In addition, honors programs offer universities a way to produce high-achieving graduates and alumni that reflect on the school. If honors programs increase the prestige of the school overall, they may also help increase the appeal of the school to students not even in the special curriculum.

The appeal of honors programs has also grown for students. The past several decades have witnessed rapid increases in tuition that outpace both inflation and the growth in family incomes. From 1977 to 1997, after adjusting for inflation, the price of college attendance grew 49 percent while the median family income grew only 10 percent.[2] As a result, more students are looking for less expensive postsecondary options. For high-achieving students, honors programs present a desirable alternative to expensive, Ivy League schools. Several articles in the popular press have chronicled how students offered admission to places like Harvard University have instead chosen cheaper institutions with honors programs (Fischer, 1996; Lord, 1998; Samuels, 2001). Some of the opportunities described by honors program students include small classes, personal attention from faculty, academic freedom, and networking possibilities (Samuels, 2001). In his book, *Ivy League Programs at State School Prices*, Sullivan (1994) highlights the enriching opportunities presented by public colleges with honors programs so that "you in effect can go to the Ivy League at about half the price." In summary, honors colleges offer students a unique, high-quality experience at a low cost.

However, there are concerns that honors programs negatively impact their host institutions as well as non-honors students. One vocal critic of honors programs has been Murray Sperber. In a 2000 *Chronicle of Higher Education* article he argues that honors programs siphon off the best students, teachers, and other campus resources, leaving non-honors students with an inadequate education. He questions why the higher educational standards and opportunities honors programs

advertise are not available to all students. Another *New York Times* article describes the resentment of non-honors students who must deal with being shut out of classes and taught by incompetent teaching assistants (Samuels, 2001).

While the visibility of honors colleges among students and schools has increased, comparatively little systematic research has been done to understand their effects. Byrne (1998) presents a review of the literature on honors programs at community colleges. He discusses how their growth at these two-year institutions has been a response to the needs of highly skilled and motivated students who were left out after movements in the 1960s to focus attention on less well-prepared students. However, much of the work reviewed by Byrne is at least ten years old and does not comment on recent trends in the establishment of honors programs. Most other work on honors programs examines their effect at a specific institution (for a recent example, see Denk, 1998, which discusses the University of Toledo honors program). However, no work could be found on honors programs at four-year institutions in general.

The effect of honors programs on the outcomes of their students is also unclear. There is no information on whether honors students reap as large of a return from attending an honors program as they would have from attending an Ivy League-type school. However, there is some evidence that the particular college attended is an important determinant of an individual's income. Hoxby and Long (1999) find that the disparity in resources available at different types of colleges, both in terms of peers and money, is important to understanding increases in wage inequality among college graduates. They conclude that structural changes in the market of higher education and the institutions themselves have increased the importance of the particular college attended.

Other studies have focused on the effects elite private colleges in particular. Brewer, Eide, and Ehrenberg (1999) find evidence, even after controlling for selection effects, that there is a significant economic return to attending an elite private college. Hoxby (1998) takes into account differences in college costs by school type and provides further support for this notion. She finds that a student who chooses an expensive Rank 1 college (such as Dartmouth) over a good and much less expensive public college in Rank 3 (e.g. University of Virgina) would recover the tuition difference sixfold over the course of his career. If the student instead paid the average tuition at each

---

[2] Source: NCES, 1997; U.S. Census Bureau, 1998.

institution rather than list price (because of scholarships and aid), the recovery would jump to 30-fold. However, on the other side of the debate, Dale and Krueger (1999) find that talented kids who attended less-selective schools did just as well in their careers as their counterparts at elite colleges. Naming this the "Spielberg Effect," they conclude that students that apply to the top schools do not have to actually attend them to realize a significant return.

This review of the literature highlights that many questions remain about the development and impact of honors programs. This paper serves to fill part of this gap in the literature by examining which institutions have honors programs and how the programs are structured. Future work will consider what impact honors programs have had on their hosts and students.

III. THE DATA

To build a profile of honors colleges and programs, I compiled a data set from several sources. First, the 1997 and 1999 editions of *Peterson's Honors Programs* provided information on program age, size, admission requirements, and special facilities as well as a description of the honors program within the context of the larger university. Peterson collected this information as the official guide of the National Collegiate Honors Council (NCHC), an organization established in 1966 to assist honors programs create and enhance opportunities for "exceptionally able" undergraduates. All the institutions included in the data meet the NCHC's criteria for a fully developed honors program: a defined mandate and mission along with a clear course of study.

The dataset includes information from as recent as the spring of 1999 on over 500 honors programs and colleges. However, this is unlikely to be a complete list of all of the honors programs and colleges in the United States (as of 2001, the NCHC had 788 members). Nonetheless, the programs profiled are likely to be those concerned with marketing themselves to prospective students (given the goal of the publication), and these are the types of programs this study set out to study. A second limitation of this data set is that the information is self-reported by the institution. Therefore, one should take special caution in interpreting the results. Self-reported data is more susceptible to measurement error. Furthermore, institutions may have incentives to inflate or deflate their numbers in order to appeal to the audience of prospective students to which the book is geared.

Data from the Peterson's guides were linked with institutional, financial, and enrollment information from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), an annual National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) data set on postsecondary institutions within the United States. In addition, Barron's *Profiles of American Colleges* provided information on student body test scores and the selectivity of the institution.[3]

IV. RESULTS: A PROFILE OF HONORS PROGRAMS

The Number and Growth of Honors Programs

- Of the 506 honors programs and colleges profiled in the two editions of Peterson's *Honors Programs*, over half are at public four-year colleges.
- Private, two-year institutions (proprietary colleges) rarely have honors programs. Only five were listed. Therefore, this analysis will not examine them.
- As of spring 1999, the average honors programs was about 17 years old meaning that it had been established during the early 1980s. However, programs at public four-year colleges are on average a little older than programs at four-year colleges. Honor programs at community colleges are relatively new being on average only about 11 years old. (Table 1)
- Of the programs in existence, nearly one-third were established during the previous ten years as of the 1999 edition. However, this proportion varies by institution type. (Table 1)
- Unfortunately, information on the age of an honors program was only available for about three-quarters of the sample so it is not clear how representative this information is for the entire group. This problem is of the most concern with respect to the public two-year colleges – only 66 percent of the sample provided information on the years of existence.

What types of Public Four-year Institutions establish Honors Programs? (see Table 2)

- Forty-two percent of public four-year colleges have honors programs. This is the highest of any group. About one-quarter of these programs have been established since 1989.

---

[3] If the median score was missing for a college but the school was grouped into a competitiveness category, the test score assigned is equal to the mean score of colleges in that category. Schools were categorized in the following way: "Most Competitive" and "Highly Competitive" had 1995 student body median SAT scores between 1120 and 1600, 1000 to 1119 for "Very Competitive," 850 to 999 for "Competitive," 650 to 849 for "Less Competitive," and 400 to 649 for "Non Competitive."

- In terms of Carnegie classification, public four-year institutions with honors programs are more likely to be research or doctoral universities than comprehensive/master's institutions or baccalaureate colleges.
- No public four-year institution ranked as "Most Competitive" by the Barron's college guides has established an honors program. Colleges with honors programs are more likely to be classified as "Highly Competitive" (for those over 10 years old), "Very Competitive," or "Competitive."
- On average, schools with honors programs have a higher median student body SAT score. They also have a greater number of National Merit Scholars. However, these results should not be interpreted as causal – these patterns may have existed even before the establishment of an honors programs
- Public four-year institutions with honors programs are on average less expensive (in terms of list tuition price) and are larger (in terms of FTE undergraduate enrollment).
- The institutions that were most likely to establish honor programs at public four-year institutions are in the Southeast (for programs that are over ten years old) and in the Southeast or Southwest (for those more recently established).
- Table 5 confirms that many of these differences between institutions with and without honors programs are statistically significant. Furthermore, larger states (in terms of population) are less likely to have public four-year institutions with honors programs.

What types of Private Four-year Institutions establish Honors Programs? (see Table 3)

- Eleven percent of private four-year institutions have honors colleges. Thirty-nine percent of these programs have been established since 1989.
- A disproportionate number of honor programs at least ten years old are at institutions classified as doctoral or comprehensive. However, during the last ten years, honors programs were more likely to be created at liberal arts and comprehensive institutions.
- Private four-year honors programs are most likely to be at institutions labeled "Competitive" or "Very Competitive" institutions.

- In contrast to honors programs at public four-year schools, private four-year honors programs are on average at more expensive colleges. They are also at larger institutions (especially for the honor programs founded prior to 1989).
- Private four-year institutions with honors programs have fewer students of color than other private colleges.
- Honors programs at private four-year institutions are disproportionately in the Mideast. Those that were established before 1989 are also found disproportionately in the Great Lakes and Southeast regions.
- Table 5 confirms that many of these differences between institutions with and without honors programs are statistically significant.

What types of Public Two-year Institutions establish Honors Programs? (see Table 4)

- Only 6.5 percent of community colleges have honors programs. Over forty percent of these programs have been established during the last ten years.
- Public two-year institutions with honors programs are on average larger than their counterparts. Programs founded before 1989 were also on average more expensive.
- They also have a comparably larger percentage of Hispanic students.
- Disproportionately more honors programs at community colleges are found in the Mideast, Great Lakes, and Southwest regions for those that are at least ten years old. The more recent programs are disproportionately found in the Plains and Southwest.
- Table 5 confirms that many of these differences between institutions with and without honors programs are statistically significant. Furthermore, larger states (in terms of population) are more likely to have community colleges with honors programs.

Younger versus Older Honors Programs

Table 6 examines the differences between old and young honors programs. Many of the differences are not statistically significant, but one can draw the following conclusions:

- Older programs are more likely to be at research or doctoral institutions.
- Older programs are also more likely to be in smaller states.

- There is also evidence that older programs at private four-year institutions have a larger percentage of minority students than their younger counterparts.
- The younger honors programs at community colleges are more likely to be found in the Midwest or South. They are also at slightly larger schools.

The Characteristics and Structure of Honor Programs (see Tables 7 and 8)

- Only public four-year institutions have a significant number of honors "colleges" rather than honors "programs." They make up about one-fifth of the honors offerings at public four-year institutions. The main differences between these types of offerings are that honors colleges are more likely to have separate dorms and special scholarships for honors students. They also tend to be larger.
- Most honors programs offer "general" honors while few offer "departmental" honors.
- Over half of honors programs offer some combination of special courses either as seminars or colloquia (67 percent) or regular courses (69 percent). Many programs at four-year institutions (both public and private) also offer independent study or research options. Four-fifths of programs at four-year schools and three-fifths of programs at community colleges offer more than just one special course option.
- Most honors "programs" do not offer special living arrangements although the majority of honors "colleges" offer either a separate dorm (76 percent) or special wing of a dorm (21 percent).
- About half of honors programs require the SAT or ACT for admissions. However, community colleges are more likely to use a student's high school GPA to decide admission.
- Nearly 60 percent of honors programs at four-year institutions only accept freshman (43 percent) or freshman and sophomore (15 percent) students. Most of the rest accept students at any level. A large majority also will accept transfer students.
- Three-quarters of public institutions (both four- and two-year) offer special scholarships to honors students. At one-eighth of the programs at the public four-year colleges, nearly all of the honors students receive some sort of special aid. At private four-year institutions, only about half of the honors programs offer special aid but one-fifth of honors students at these schools receive some sort of special support.

- Honors programs tend to have less than 500 students. At private four-year and public two-year institutions, over half have less than 100 students.
- The table also presents the exact enrollment totals for programs that supplied the data (61 percent of the sample). The median (50th percentile) program size in the 1999 was 300 students for public four-year institutions, 105 for private four-year institutions, and 75 for community colleges.
- For the institutions for which I have data, the honors programs make up about five percent of the school's total FTE undergraduate enrollment, but this varies greatly by the type of institution. Honors programs at private four-year institutions make up seven percent of the student population but only two percent at community colleges.

How does the structure of the Honor Program relate to the Host Institution? (see Tables 9 and 10)

- Among public four-year institutions, research and doctoral schools are more likely than liberal arts institutions to offer special housing. In addition, colleges categorized as "Competitive" or "Less Competitive" are more likely to offer special housing and scholarships than schools ranked more selective.
- Among private four-year institutions, research and doctoral schools are less likely than liberal arts institutions to offer other special features such as advising resources or extracurricular activities. "Less Competitive" colleges are more likely to offer special financial aid to honors students.
- The likelihood of offering special housing for honors students is positively related to the size of the college for both public and private institutions.
- No statistical differences existed between different types of community colleges in terms of the characteristics of the honors programs.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The presence of honors programs appears to be widespread throughout American higher education. Nearly half of all public four-year colleges and universities have an honors program and

many also can be found on private four-year and community college campuses. To summarize some of the facts outlined above, honors programs are most likely to be found at:

(1) Institutions ranked as "Very Competitive" or "Competitive" (the middle selectivity groups)[4]

(2) Colleges with the Carnegie classification of research or doctoral for public four-year institutions and comprehensive for private four-year institutions

(3) Larger institutions (as determined by undergraduate enrollment)

(4) In the Mideast for private four-year colleges and in the Southeast for public four-year colleges[5]

(5) At colleges more expensive than the mean for private four-year schools and less expensive than the mean for public four-year schools

Meanwhile, honors programs at community colleges are relatively new and are only at less than seven percent of public two-year schools.

These institutional patterns suggest that honors programs are indeed used a competitive tool to attract high-achieving students. The facts agree with what theory would dictate – namely, honors programs are more likely to be found at institutions that are:

(a) At the margin of attracting high-ability students...

In other words, by enhancing their offerings to high achieving students, they are likely to reap some benefit. This develops from the fact that the institutions are just below the "Most" and "Highly Competitive" groups and probably have already been able to appeal to some high-ability students. Put another way, "Noncompetitive" and "Less Competitive" schools have less incentive to create honors colleges since they are far different than their more selective competitors.

(b) In extremely competitive environments...

Private four-year institutions likely to have honors programs in terms of selectivity and price are part of a stratum of colleges that have faced heightened increases in competition.

---

[4] Barron's classifies school as "Very Competitive" if they have median student body SAT scores of 1000 to 1119 and 850 to 999 for "Competitive."

[5] The "Mideast" is comprised of Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. The "Southeast" is Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Furthermore, many of the private four-year colleges with honors programs are in the Mideast, a particularly competitive environment for private colleges.[6]

(c) In places where brain drain is of particular concern...

The region where honors programs at public four-year colleges are most likely to be found is the Southeast. This is also the region where state merit-based aid programs (e.g. the Georgia HOPE Scholarship) began and have grown the most. Since many of the honor programs in this area are over ten years old, it is possible that honor programs were actually the precursor to the state merit-based scholarships.

(d) Under constraints not to change the overall mission of the school while still trying to attract high-ability students...

Over half of honors programs are found at public four-year colleges. These institutions are under the pressure of the state legislature and public not to abandon the mission of providing postsecondary options for students of all ability levels. Honors programs also tend to be at larger schools where it would be extremely difficult raise the achievement level of the entire student body.

Additionally, the pattern of growth of honors programs suggests they are primarily a relatively new development. Most honors programs are less than twenty years old, and almost one-third of all honors programs are less than ten years old.[7] During this time, competition between schools and the influence of college ranking systems increased substantially. Moreover, much of this growth also coincides with the recent rise in merit-based financial aid. Since honors programs are present on many college campuses and their enhanced offerings to students do not appear to be trivial, they should not be ignored in larger discussions about merit-based support. However, it is unclear if any of these trends are truly related or whether one trend actually caused another. Nonetheless, these observations certainly suggest need for further study.

---

[6] Even though the Northeast is also a particularly competitive environment for private institutions, many of the schools in this area are in the "Most" or "Highly Competitive" groups.

[7] Unfortunately, limitations in the data do not allow me to observe changes in the size or resources of existing honors programs so I can not track within-institution trends.

Remaining Questions

This research is only a first step in understanding the role of honors programs, and many questions remain. Foremost, what is the impact of honors programs on their host institutions and on their students. How does an honors program affect the number of high achieving students a college is able to recruit? Furthermore, how does an honors program impact resource allocation within a university? Is there any evidence to suggest that they exist at the expense of average-ability students and/or traditional need-based programs? How are resources such as faculty members and expenditures redistributed to accommodate the creation of an honors college? Finally, what effect do honors programs have on student outcomes? Do participants realize the same returns to higher education as those at more prestigious universities? Further data collection is needed to examine these important issues.

REFERENCES

Brewer, Dominic J., Eric R. Eide, and Ronald G. Ehrenberg (1999) "Does It Pay to Attend an Elite Private College? Cross-Cohort Evidence on the Effects of College Type on Earnings." *Journal of Human Resources*. vol. 34, no. 1, Winter.

Clotfelter, Charles T. (1996) *Buying the Best: Cost Escalation in Elite Higher Education*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Dale, Stacy Berg and Alan B. Krueger (1999) "Estimating the Payoff to Attending a More Selective College: An Application of Selection on Observables and Unobservables. *NBER Working Paper 7322*, August.

Denk, Walter Josef (1998) "Honors as a Recruiting Magnet." *Metropolitan Universities: An International Forum*, vol. 9, no. 2, Fall.

Education Commission of the States (1999) "Versions of HOPE Scholarships." *ECS State Notes: Financial Aid*, April.

Ehrenberg, Ronald G. (2000a) "The Supply of American Higher Education Institutions" Unpublished paper prepared for the meeting of the Forum for the Future of Higher Education, September.

Ehrenberg, Ronald G. (2000b) *Tuition Rising: Why college costs so much*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fischer, David (1996) "The New Honors Programs: Low-cost, high-quality option for the academically talented." *U.S. News and World Report*, September 16.

Graham, Amy E. and Robert J. Morse. "How U.S. News ranks colleges." *U.S. News Online*. (Found at http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/college/rankings/collmeth.htm)

Hoxby, Caroline (1998) "The Return to Attending a More Selective College: 1960 to the Present." Harvard University mimeo.

Hoxby, Caroline and Bridget Long (1999) "Explaining Rising Income and Wage Inequality Among the College-Educated" *NBER Working Paper No. 6873*.

Hoxby, Caroline (1998) "The Return to Attending a More Selective College: 1960 to the Present." Harvard University mimeo.

Lord, Lewis (1998) "Choosing an Honors Experience." U.S. New and World Report, August 31.

McPherson, Michael and Morton O. Schapiro (1998) *The Student Aid Game*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rothschild, Michael and Lawrence J. White (1993) "The University in the Marketplace: Some Insights and Some Puzzles." *Studies of Supply and Demand in Higher Education*. Clotfelter, Charles and Michael Rothschild, eds. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Samuels, Sam Hooper (2001) "How do a get a private-college education for the price of a public? With Honors." *New York Times*, August 5.

Sperber, Murray (2000) "End the Mediocrity of Our Public Universities." Chronicle of Higher Education, October 20.

Table 1: The Number of Years of Existence of Honors Programs and Colleges (as of Spring 1999)

	Full Sample	Public Four-Year Institutions	Private Four-Year Institutions	Public Two-Year Institutions
Years in Existence (Standard Deviation)	17.3 (12.0)	19.7 (12.2)	16.6 (12.8)	11.3 (6.5)
Number founded in the last 11 to 20 Years	145	73	37	27
Number founded in the last 6 to 10 Years	63	29	20	12
Number founded in the Last 5 Years	61	23	22	12
Percentage founded in the last 11 to 20 Years	37.8	36.0	34.0	47.4
Percentage founded in the last 6 to 10 Years	16.5	14.3	18.3	21.0
Percentage founded in the Last 5 Years	15.9	11.3	20.2	21.1
Data observations	383	203	109	57
Total Number	506	267	147	87

Data source: *Peterson's Honors Programs*, 2nd edition.
Notes: Since this data was not available for all institutions, the number of observations used to calculate the figures is noted. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions.

Table 2: Characteristics of the Host Institutions – Public Four-year Colleges
Percentages in each category unless otherwise noted

	Institutions without Honors Programs	Institutions with Programs over 10 years in Existence	Institutions with Programs founded in the last 10 years
Number	279	149	45
Percentage	59.0	31.5	9.5
Carnegie Classification			
Research	18.9	62.3	18.9
Doctoral	30.4	58.7	10.9
Comprehensive	61.9	27.4	10.8
Liberal Arts	80.0	10.0	10.0
Barron's Competitiveness Rating			
Most Competitive	100.0	0.0	0.0
Highly Competitive	46.2	46.2	7.7
Very Competitive	31.0	44.8	24.1
Competitive	47.2	41.6	11.2
Less Competitive	76.6	17.5	5.8
Non Competitive	71.9	17.5	10.5
1995 Median SAT (standard deviation)	891 (105)	950 (98)	944 (100)
Number of National Merit Scholars entering 2000-2001 [Number of Observations]	15.4 [57]	39.2 [96]	85 [25]
Student Body Characteristics			
% Black	12.7	11.2	10.6
% Hispanic	4.9	3.3	3.9
% Asian	3.2	2.9	3.5
1999-2000 Tuition List Price			
Mean (Standard Deviation) [Number of Observations]	$2,894 (1,573) [260]	$2,710 (1,152) [148]	$2,310 (1,449) [44]
1997-98 Undergraduate Enrollment			
Mean (Standard Deviation) [Number of Observations]	5,001 (4,748) [278]	11,242 (6,476) [149]	8,359 (7,013) [45]
Region			
New England	62.5	28.1	9.4
Mideast	64.0	29.1	7.0
Great Lakes	62.1	31.8	6.1
Plains	65.2	26.1	8.7
Southeast	45.0	41.1	14.0
Southwest	53.6	25.0	21.4
Rocky Mountains	56.5	34.8	8.7
Far West	72.7	20.5	6.8

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: Only includes one observation of institutions that have more than one honors colleges or program. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions. Where the full number of institutions is not used, the number of observations is noted.

Table 3: Characteristics of the Host Institutions – Private Four-year Colleges
Percentages in each category unless otherwise noted

	Institutions without Honors Programs	Institutions with Programs over 10 years in Existence	Institutions with Honors Programs founded in the last 10 years
Number of Observations	866	67	42
Percentage	88.8	6.9	4.3
Carnegie Classification			
Research	87.1	9.7	3.2
Doctoral	81.8	18.2	0.0
Comprehensive	77.6	16.8	5.6
Liberal Arts	89.4	5.8	4.8
Barron's Competitiveness Rating			
Most Competitive	100.0	0.0	0.0
Highly Competitive	93.9	4.1	2.0
Very Competitive	81.8	13.3	4.9
Competitive	83.1	10.0	6.9
Less Competitive	95.1	2.5	2.5
Non Competitive	100.0	0.0	0.0
1995 Median SAT (standard deviation)	948 (142)	990 (94)	950 (83)
Number of National Merit Scholars entering 2000-2001 [Number of Observations]	25.2 [288]	14.0 [34]	3.3 [14]
1999-2000 Tuition List Price			
Mean (Standard Deviation) [Number of Observations]	$13,430 (5,441) [819]	$14,591 (3,892) [65]	$14,652 (3,262) [41]
1997-98 Undergraduate Enrollment			
Mean (Standard Deviation) [Number of Observations]	1,574 (1,691) [843]	3,440 (3,757) [67]	1,897 (1,411) [42]
Student Body Characteristics			
% Black	10.9	14.0	7.9
% Hispanic	3.2	4.3	2.3
% Asian	3.0	2.4	2.3
Region			
New England	92.6	2.1	5.3
Mideast	82.5	9.0	8.5
Great Lakes	86.4	9.0	4.5
Plains	93.5	4.1	2.4
Southeast	87.9	9.1	3.0
Southwest	90.0	6.7	3.3
Rocky Mountains	94.4	5.6	0.0
Far West	95.7	2.1	2.1

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: Only includes one observation of institutions that have more than one honors colleges or program. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions. Where the full number of institutions is not used, the number of observations is noted.

Table 4: Characteristics of the Host Institutions – Public Two-year Colleges
Percentages in each category unless otherwise noted

	Institutions without Honors Programs	Institutions with Programs over 10 years in Existence	Institutions with Honors Programs founded in the last 10 years
Number of Observations	815	33	24
Percentage	93.5	3.8	2.8
1999-2000 Tuition List Price			
Mean	$1,677	$2,158	$1,623
(Standard Deviation)	(1,195)	(1,737)	(1,355)
[Number of Observations]	[787]	[32]	[24]
1997-98 Undergraduate Enrollment			
Mean	3,376	7,246	5,859
(Standard Deviation)	(3,272)	(4,627)	(4,296)
[Number of Observations]	[780]	[33]	[24]
Student Body Characteristics			
% Black	11.1	8.8	8.8
% Hispanic	5.8	7.7	8.0
% Asian	2.8	2.8	2.9
Region			
New England	93.3	4.4	2.2
Mideast	91.8	7.1	1.2
Great Lakes	90.7	6.5	2.9
Plains	94.3	1.2	4.6
Southeast	95.7	2.0	2.4
Southwest	89.5	6.7	3.8
Rocky Mountains	100.0	0.0	0.0
Far West	94.4	2.4	3.2

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: Only includes one observation of institutions that have more than one honors colleges or program. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions. Where the full number of institutions is not used, the number of observations is noted.

Table 5: The Likelihood of Having an Honors Program or College – *Logistic Regression Model*
Marginal Effect on the Probability of having an Honors Program or College (z-statistics in parentheses)

	Public Four-Year	Private Four-Year	Public Two-Year
Carnegie Codes (relative to Baccalaureate/Liberal Arts Institutions)			
Research	.7012	-.3263	
	(.82)	(.44)	
Doctoral	2.416**	-.3147	
	(2.31)	(.56)	
Comprehensive/Master's	1.457**	.8812**	
	(2.35)	(2.71)	
Barron's Selectivity Rating (relative to Most or Highly Competitive)			
Very Competitive	4.331**	25.547**	
	(2.23)	(3.90)	
Competitive	4.438**	35.949**	
	(2.36)	(4.16)	
Less Competitive	2.637**	12.547**	
	(1.75)	(2.81)	
Non Competitive	2.4318		
	(1.57)		
Other College Characteristics			
1999 List In-State Tuition (per thousand)	-.1808*	.0742**	.0216
	(1.69)	(2.02)	(.14)
1997 FTE Undergraduate Enrollment (per thousand)	.2634**	.3513**	.2024**
	(7.18)	(4.74)	(6.17)
Percent Minority	-.0071	.0041	-.0086
	(1.47)	(.70)	(1.14)
Region (relative to Northeast)			
Mideast	1.499*	2.617**	-.1671
	(1.68)	(2.64)	(.24)
Great Lakes	-.4076	2.475**	-.4116
	(.96)	(2.45)	(.69)
Plains	-.2700	1.092	-.2182
	(.59)	(1.32)	(.32)
South	.5569	3.311**	-.4915
	(.87)	(2.80)	(.91)
Rocky Mountains and Southwest	-.2843	2.019*	-.2364
	(.65)	(1.75)	(.37)
Far West	-.3260	.1490	-.7593*
	(.63)	(.21)	(1.65)
State Characteristics			
State Population 2000 (per million)	-.0435**	-.0038	.0338*
	(2.16)	(.20)	(1.63)
1999 Percent of State Population with BA/BS degree	-.0037	.0438	-.0475
	(.13)	(1.58)	(1.15)
R-squared	.2595	.1740	.1048
Number of observations	517	911	840

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.

Table 6: The Age of Honors Programs at Different Types of Institutions – *OLS Regression Model*
Dependent Variable: Years in Existence (as of Spring 1999)

	Public Four-Years	Private Four-Years	Public Two-Year
Carnegie Codes (relative to Baccalaureate/Liberal Arts Institutions)			
Research or Doctoral	8.929**	18.182**	
	(3.961)	(6.705)	
Comprehensive/Master's	.9723	2.127	
	(3.788)	(2.473)	
Barron's Selectivity Rating (relative to Most or Highly Competitive)			
Competitive	2.371	-.0151	
	(2.384)	(2.980)	
Less Competitive	3.750	-1.565	
	(3.129)	(4.370)	
Non Competitive	.9561	.0707	
	(3.9407)	(.0598)	
Other College Characteristics			
1999 List In-State Tuition (per thousand)	.0400	.7531	.6206
	(.8992)	(.5233)	(.8001)
1997 FTE Undergraduate Enrollment (per thousand)	.1148	12.098	.4506*
	(.1613)	(9.574)	(.2294)
Percent Minority	.0186	8.631**	-.0210
	(.0443)	(2.761)	(.0812)
Region (relative to East)			
Midwest	1.157	2.554	-8.745**
	(3.013)	3.409)	(3.482)
South	-1.203	6.770	-12.128**
	(3.242)	(4.227)	(5.293)
West	1.583	.0001	-6.364
	(3.390)	(.0002)	(4.072)
State Characteristics			
State Population 2000 (per thousand)	-.0005**	-.5204*	-.0001
	(.0001)	(.2966)	(.0001)
1999 Percent of State Population with BA/BS degree	.1160	.5123	-.5785
	(.2194)	(.4482)	(.4098)
Number of observations	201	106	55
R-squared	.1818	.3965	.1861

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: Standard errors are displayed in the parentheses.

Table 7: Characteristics of Honors Programs and Colleges (Percentages unless otherwise noted)

	Public Four-Year Institutions			Private Four-Year Institutions	Public Two-Year Institutions
	Full Sample	Honors College	Honors Program		
Total Number	267	54	209	147	87
Percentage of Programs	52.8	10.8	41.7	28.9	17.4
Honors Type					
Titled a "Program"	80.2	--	100.0	95.2	100.0
Titled a "College"	19.9	100.0	--	4.8	0.0
Type of Honors offered					
College	13.9	25.9	11.0	10.9	11.5
Departmental	3.0	--	3.4	1.4	2.3
General	75.7	68.5	77.5	85.7	85.1
Departmental & General	7.5	5.6	8.1	2.0	1.2
Special Courses Offered					
Special seminars or colloquia	66.7	7.4	65.6	73.5	55.2
Special courses	68.2	7.4	67.5	66.7	73.6
Special sections of core courses	46.4	48.1	46.4	33.3	42.5
Independent study or research	63.3	61.1	64.6	68.7	18.4
Multiple Special Offerings	83.1	88.9	81.8	83.0	60.9
Special Housing					
Honors dorm	29.3	75.9	23.4	7.1	0
Special wing of a dorm	8.7	20.7	6.7	2.1	0
None	62.0	3.5	69.9	90.7	100.0
Other Special Features	74.2	68.5	74.6	69.4	63.2
Admission Requirements					
High School GPA	27.7	25.9	28.2	31.7	58.6
SAT or ACT scores	56.1	57.4	56.3	42.8	46.0
High School Rank	25.8	33.3	23.8	22.8	20.7
Level of Student Admitted					
Freshman	37.8	48.2	35.9	48.3	47.1
Freshman & Sophomores	7.9	--	9.5	8.8	51.7
Upperclassmen	0.8	--	1.0	0.7	---
Any level	53.6	51.9	53.6	40.8	---
After 3 or more credits	--	--	--	1.4	1.2
Transfers	90.6	88.9	90.9	89.1	81.6
Scholarships					
Special Aid for Honors College students?	75.3	88.9	71.8	49.7	73.4
Schools at which nearly all honors students get some Aid	12.6	14.8	12.0	18.2	17.7

Data source: *Peterson's Honors Programs*, 1st and 2nd editions.

Notes: Due to rounding, the percentages may not sum to one hundred. "Other Special Features" include advising resources, extracurricular activities, conferences, computer centers, and other programs and amenities. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions.

Table 8: The Size of Honors Programs and Colleges

	Public Four-Year Institutions	Private Four-Year Institutions	Public Two-Year Institutions
CATEGORICAL VARIABLE			
Size 1999			
Small (<100)	21.0%	50.3%	65.5%
Medium (100 to 500)	49.4%	44.2%	29.9%
Large (500+)	29.6%	5.4%	4.6%
Number of Observations	*267*	*147*	*87*
CONTINUOUS VARIABLES			
Enrollment 1997			
Mean	468	227	228
(Standard Deviation)	(550)	(324)	(423)
[Number of Observations]	[172]	[90]	[45]
Enrollment 1999			
Mean	529	197	172
(Standard Deviation)	(657)	(281)	(317)
[Number of Observations]	[203]	[118]	[65]
Median	300	105	75
1999 Size Relative to Institution's Undergraduate FTE Enrollment			
Mean	.0442	.0704	.0186
(Standard Deviation)	(.0327)	(.0463)	(.0127)
[Number of Observations]	[200]	[114]	[57]

Data source: *Peterson's Honors Programs*, 1st and 2nd editions.

Notes: Since the exact enrollment numbers were not available for all institutions, the number of observations used to calculate the figures is noted. Does not include five honors programs at private, two-year institutions. Where the full number of institutions is not used, the number of observations is noted.

Table 9: Honors Program Characteristics by Institution Type – *Public Four-year Institutions*
Logistic Regression Model
Marginal Effect on the Probability of having a Program Characteristic (z-statistics in parentheses)

	Special Housing	Other Special Features	Special Scholarships Available
Carnegie Codes (relative to Baccalaureate/Liberal Arts Institutions)			
Research or Doctoral	4.055*	-.1001	-.6823
	(1.91)	(.15)	(1.28)
Comprehensive/Master's	1.393	-.0719	-.4850
	(1.05)	(.11)	(.80)
Barron's Selectivity Rating (relative to Most, Highly, or Very Competitive)			
Competitive	2.614**	.2485	1.8117**
	(2.77)	(.54)	(2.41)
Less Competitive	1.8393*	.4352	1.9211**
	(1.82)	(.68)	(2.00)
Non Competitive	2.218	-.4712	1.2820
	(1.59)	(.98)	(1.24)
Other College Characteristics			
1999 List In-State Tuition (per thousand)	-.1476	-.2691**	.1272
	(.93)	(1.88)	(.69)
1997 FTE Undergraduate Enrollment (per thousand)	.0750**	.0256	.1036**
	(2.45)	(.90)	(2.89)
Percent Minority	.0096	.0236**	-.0053
	(1.20)	(2.06)	(.67)
Region (relative to East)			
Midwest	-.0843	-.2773	-.7122**
	(.17)	(.61)	(2.29)
South	.0951	-.6294*	-.4445
	(.16)	(1.64)	(.95)
West	-.4359	-.7354**	-.3881
	(.97)	(2.14)	(.76)
State Characteristics			
State Population 2000 (per million)	-.0269	-.0438*	-.0291
	(1.08)	(1.71)	(1.14)
1999 Percent of State Population with BA/BS degree	.0313	-.0044	-.0061
	(.81)	(.12)	(.15)
R-squared	.0859	.0417	.0679
Number of observations	233	258	258

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: "Other Special Features" include advising resources, extracurricular activities, conferences, computer centers, and other programs and amenities.

Table 10: Honors Program Characteristics by Institution Type – *Private Four-year Institutions*
Logistic Regression Model
Marginal Effect on the Probability of having a Program Characteristic (z-statistics in parentheses)

	Special Housing	Other Special Features	Special Scholarships Available
Carnegie Codes (relative to Baccalaureate/Liberal Arts Institutions)			
Research or Doctoral	-.9614 (1.39)	-.8649* (1.73)	1.6842 (.90)
Comprehensive/Master's	.7553 (.63)	-.0957 (.22)	-.0129 (.03)
Barron's Selectivity Rating (relative to Most, Highly, or Very Competitive)			
Competitive	1.035 (.68)	-.0442 (.08)	.4029 (.66)
Less Competitive	1.979 (.69)	.6466 (.60)	3.604* (1.92)
Other College Characteristics			
1999 List In-State Tuition (per thousand)	.1269 (.62)	.0704 (.80)	.0222 (.27)
1997 FTE Undergraduate Enrollment (per thousand)	1.0964** (2.91)	.2148 (1.54)	-.1357 (1.13)
Percent Minority	-.0263 (.82)	-.0014 (.12)	.0054 (.50)
Region (relative to East)			
Midwest	-.2655 (.30)	-.5803* (1.67)	-.1965 (.46)
South	9.339** (2.24)	-.2516 (.45)	.1599 (.25)
West	-.9960 (.46)	-.3851 (.66)	-.6130 (1.33)
State Characteristics			
State Population 2000 (per million)	-.1569* (1.79)	.0116 (.32)	.0442 (1.29)
1999 Percent of State Population with BA/BS degree	.1002 (.98)	-.0167 (.32)	.0220 (.43)
R-squared	.3289	.0580	.0632
Number of observations	133	138	138

Data source: IPEDS Institutional Characteristics linked with colleges in *Peterson's Honors Programs*.
Notes: "Other Special Features" include advising resources, extracurricular activities, conferences, computer centers, and other programs and amenities.